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ABSTRACT

A review of 19 studies in 17 articles on sex-role stereotyping and television has revealed some common characteristics. Three types of research can be classified: content, effect, and correlation. Content analysis was the most popular. Even though various types of TV programs were studied, each research study investigated only one type of program and/or commercial at a time. Most researchers used children as their respondents. The results from 15 research studies in this analysis supported the notion that there was significant sex-role stereotyping in television content, and viewers were likely to perceive and be able to recall such behavior. However, four studies done in the 1980s showed contradictory findings which may reflect a slowly changing trend for women in American society. (Two tables of data are included, and 30 references are attached.) (Author/MG)

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CHARACTERISTICS OF RESEARCH ON SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPING AND TELEVISION

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CHARATERISTICS OF RESEARCH ON SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPING AND TELEVISION

The review of 19 studies in 17 articles on sex-role stereotyping and television has revealed some common characteristics. Three types of research can be grouped: content, effect and correlation. Content analysis was most popular. Even though various types of programs were studied, every research in this study investigated only one type of program and/or commercial at a time. Most researchers used children as their respondents. The results from 15 research in this study supported the notion that there were significant sex-role stereotyping in television content, and viewers were likely to perceive and be able to recall such behavior. However, four studies done in 1980's showed contradictory findings which may reflect a slow changing trend of women in American society.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RESEARCH ON SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPING AND TELEVISION

Research on sex-role stereotyping and television has been the subject of interest since the early 1970's. During that time, there was a growing concern that the relatively stereotyped sex-roles which prevailed in the society might have undesirable consequences. At the same period, the report of the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior indicated that children would indeed imitate televised violence. If television can influence antisocial behavior, it may possibly affect other behavior as well. Moreover, the feminist movement at that time also pointed out the problem of sex-role stereotyping in our society.

Mayes & Valentine (1976) defined stereotyped sex roles as "a collection of traditional norms that differentiate typical feminine behavior patterns from typical masculine ones in contemporary society". Although this difference between both sexes does in fact exist, it has been defined as negative when it is "overly restrictive, demeaning or erroneous" (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1979). Sex-role stereotyping is significant in the sense that it can influence the way in which individuals interact in society and perceive themselves. It can be harmful if the individuals who engage in it feel that they are superior and treat others in an unequal manner.

With an increased concern for the social effects of television, research on sex-role stereotyping on this new media

have increased tremendously during the past two decades. Different methods were used to examine different types of programs and viewers to identify the influences of television on sex-role stereotyped behaviors. This study intends to analyze the research on this topic so as to come up with its common characteristics and findings.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Since the body of published research on women's issues is enormous, specific criteria were used to select the most appropriate studies to review for the present analyses. Therefore, only those investigations that have the following characteristics will be reviewed.

1. Research that paid particular attention to sex role stereotyping.
2. Research that focused on the roles of both sexes.
3. Research concerned only with television.
4. Research that was carried out in the United States.

A careful computer search of all relevant data bases, followed by a detailed review of printed bibliographies of related research reports, indicated that there was a total of 19 empirical studies in 17 articles during 1974 and 1988 that specifically met the above criteria.

REVIEW OF SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPING AND TELEVISION RESEARCH

O'Kelly (1974) examined a random selection of children's

shows and commercials. The researcher found that males and females were portrayed according to traditional conceptions of their roles. The researcher concluded that children's television remained a "stronghold" of sexist stereotyping.

Busby (1974) also studied twenty commercial network cartoon programs aired. Significant differences between males' and females' attributes, attitudes and behaviors were noted. The researcher concluded that sex roles presented in the cartoon programs may further the reinforcement of traditional definitions.

Sternglanz and Serbin (1974) had undergraduate students watch ten different videotaped cartoon shows and analyze their content. They found that male characters appeared more often than females. The latter tended to be shown in traditional occupational roles and possessing certain personality attributes associated with being female.

Frueh and McGhee (1975) investigated the relation between time spent viewing television and the degree to which subjects interpreted sex roles in stereotyped terms by gathering data from 80 children. They found significant relationship holding equally for both sexes. Those relationships did not change with increasing age.

McArthur and Resko (1976) studied the characteristics of 199 randomly selected television commercials. They reported clear instances of sex role stereotyping, including the fact that more males than females were presented. The credibility, roles,

location and arguments on behalf of a product and rewards differed in favor of males.

McArthur and Eisen (1976) conducted three studies on sex-role stereotyping:

a). They examined male and female central characters on Saturday morning television programs and found that male characters were shown more frequently than female ones. Males also exhibited higher rates of behavior.

b). Television commercials that were shown in the first study's programs were examined. The results supported its findings.

c). The researchers also found that children manifested greater imitation and recall for the behavior of a same-sex model. They explained that cross-sex imitation is more often discouraged for boys than for girls and that girls are accustomed to television programming in which same-sex models are difficult to find.

Nolan et. al. (1977) observed the sex differentiated patterns of verbal approval and disapproval on Saturday morning children programs. Males outnumbered females by a ratio of three to one. Males also differed from females in range and types of behaviors for which they received approval or disapproval.

Mayes and Valentine (1979) analyzed the effect of Saturday morning cartoon shows and found that children perceived the characters they viewed possessing sex-typed attributes.

Welch et. al. (1979) selected the videotaped records of 60 toy advertisements on Saturday and weekday morning children's programs. They found that commercials aimed at boys contained

highly active toys, varied scenes, high rates of camera cuts, high levels of sound effects, and loud music. The stereotyping of male behavior was more distinct than that of female actions.

Tan et. al. (1980) discovered that male newscasters were generally more effective than their female counterparts in producing retention of newscast materials. Boys remembered more of the newscast than did girls and learned as much from a female as from a male newscaster. However, girls learned more from a male than from a female newscaster. The authors suggested that girls might have viewed the male reporter as a more powerful news source and the role of newscaster as inappropriate for women.

Downs (1981) studied female and male central characters of 14 prime-time television programs. The results revealed that sex differences were obtained for only 3 of the 11 stereotypes under investigation. The contradictory result led the author to suggest that some television programming has undergone a transformation in the direction of fewer traditional sex-role portrayals.

Feldstein and Feldstein (1982) observed televised toy commercials during the 1977 and 1978. They indicated that there were significantly more boys than girls in the 1978 samples of commercials. Boys appeared in more commercials than girls and there were more boys than girls per commercial. Girls appeared in a more passive role than boys in 1977 but this declined in 1978. There were significantly fewer mixed-sex commercials than expected in 1977 but not in 1978. According to the authors, these

trends may have been related to a decrease in doll commercials.

Ross, Anderson and Wisocki (1982) studied the sex-role attitudes of college students and elderly respondents in relation to television viewing. They noted that the correlations between the Bem scores and stereotyped sex-role viewing scores were significant for both groups. However, only the elderly group had a significant correlation between Bem scores and amount of viewing television.

Morgan (1982) conducted the first longitudinal study of television and adolescent sex role stereotyping in order to clarify the causal direction of television viewing and sex role stereotypes. No evidence was found that girls' degree of sex-typing subsequently led to television viewing. Moreover, television had no longitudinal impact on boys' sex role attitudes, but sexism foreshadowed greater viewing among boys.

Barbatsis et.al. (1983) investigated gender role information in television dramas. They found that between-gender differences were not significantly greater than within-gender ones and concluded that gender roles in television dramas did not reflect a pattern usually associated with stereotyping.

Macklin and Kolbe (1984) found that the majority of television commercial characters were still males and male-oriented ads were more "active". In terms of audiotrack and background music, the female-oriented ads were quieter than the neutral ads. However, they were not quieter than male ones at a statistically significant level. This finding was thus in

contrast with the earlier work of Welch et. al. (1979).

Silverman-Watkins et.al.(1986) retested the study of newscasters and sex-role stereotyping. The analysis revealed that subjects were able to recall equal amounts of information regardless of the gender of the newscasters. This study provided a contrast with the earlier study by Tan and associates (1980).

ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH CHARACTERISTICS

The following table features major characteristics of research on sex-role stereotyping and television from the analysis of 19 studies in 17 articles.

Table 1 Analysis of 19 studies on sex-role stereotyping and television

Researchers	Content studied	Focal points	Respondents	Types of Research
O'Kelly (1974)	Children shows & commercials	No.& behv.of characters	---	Content
Busby(1974)	Cartoon	No.& behv.of characters	---	Content
Sternglanz & Serbin (1974)	Popular children program	No.& behv.of characters	---	Content
Freuh & McGhee(1975)	---	Time spent & Sex-role dev	Children	Correlation
McArthur & Resko(1976)	General commercials	No.& behv.of characters	---	Content
McArthur & Eisen(1976) (a)	Saturday Morning programs	No.& behv.of characters	---	Content

(b)	Sat.morning commercials	No.& behv.of characters	---	Content
(c)	Sat.morning programs & commercials	Recall & imitation of characters	Children	Effect
Nolan et.al. (1977)	Sat.morning programs	No.& behv.of character	---	Content
Mayes & Valentine (1979)	Saturday Morning cartoon	No.& behv.of characters	Children	Effect
Welch et.al. (1979)	Toy ads	No. of characters & Production procedures	---	Content
Tan et.al. (1980)	Newscast	Learning & recall of characters	Children	Effect
Downs(1981)*	Prime-time	No.& behv.of characters	---	Content
Feldstein & Feldstein (1982)	Toy ads	No.& behv.of characters	---	Content
Ross et.al. (1982)	---	Time spent & self-descrip -tion of sex role	Adults	Correlation
Morgan (1982)	---	Time spent & sex-role stereotyping over time	Children	Correlation
Barbatsis et.al. (1983)*	TV dramas	Sex-role characteris- -tics of messages	---	Content
Macklin & Kolbe (1984)*	Sat.morning commercials	No.& behv.of characters & Production procedures	---	Content

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Silverman-Watkins et.al.(1986) *	Newscast	Learning & recall from characters	Children	Effect

* Contradictory findings

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

From the review and analysis of research on sex-role stereotyping and television in the United States, four categories of generalizations can be made.

I. Types of Research. There are three major types of research on this topic.

a. **Content Analysis.** Most of the studies analyzed the content of television programs by examining the number and behaviors of the male and female characters. The significant difference between the number of males and females would reflect the unequal treatment of the sexes on television, and the sex-role stereotyped behaviors would presumably be learned by the viewers.

b. **Effect Analysis.** The effect studies came later as the researchers tried to determine whether respondents would really model their own behavior with the sex-role stereotyped behavior of the televised characters. Both content and respondents are needed in this type of study.

c. **Correlation Analysis.** Only three of the studies examined the relationship between the time spent on viewing television reported by respondents and the scores from the tests designed to measure the strength of sex-role stereotyped behavior. Therefore,

this type of research does not involve content analysis.

II. **Types of Programs**. Four major types of television programs were investigated: children-related, including Saturday morning programs and commercials, cartoons, etc., newscast, prime-time, television dramas and adult commercials. Among these, children-related programs were studied most.

It should be noted that every research in this study investigated only one type of program and/or commercial at a time. As the average amount of time viewers, especially children, spent on watching television is about six or seven hours a day, future researchers are encouraged to examine various types of programs.

III. **Respondents**. Among the seven effect and correlational studies, six used children as respondents.

There were several reasons that instigated sex-role researchers' interest in children. For instance, Kagan (1964), Mischel (1966) and Mussen (1969) determined that children learn sex role behaviors by observing sex role model. Furthermore, several researchers found that youngsters can learn social definitions from watching television. (Schramm et.al.,1961; Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1963; Lyle and Hoffman, 1972, etc.). Moreover, a concern for television's effects increased as Helizer & Heyel (1970) had also estimated that 27 million children (75% of all American children at that time) watched Saturday morning cartoon programs.

IV. **Results**. Fifteen studies supported the notion that there

were significant sex-role stereotyped behaviors portrayed in television content and viewers were likely to perceive and be able to recall such behaviors. All the correlational studies found a relationship between time spent on watching television and viewer's sex-role stereotyped behaviors.

Even though all the twelve content studies agreed that there were more males portrayed on television than females, three of which (Downs, 1981; Barbatsis, 1983 and Macklin & Kolbe, 1984) could not find a significant difference in the number, messages and behaviors of the televised characters as well as in the production procedures. Moreover, the effect study by Silverman-Watkins et. al. (1986) also found a contradictory result from the earlier study by Tan et.al. (1980). These four studies done in the 1980's argued that the contradictory findings reflect the less traditional and less stereotyped sex-roles.

Table 2 Summary of the Research Characteristics

I.	**Types of Studies**	19 studies
	1. Content	12 (63%)
	2. Effect	4 (21%)
	3. Correlational	3 (16%)
II.	**Types of Programs Studied**	16 studies
	1. Children-related	11 (69%)
	2. Newscast	2 (13%)
	3. Prime-time	1 (6%)
	4. Drama	1 (6%)
	5. General commercials	1 (6%)
III.	**Respondents**	7 studies
	1. Children	6 (86%)
	2. Adults	1 (14%)
IV.	**Results**	19 studies
	1. Significant sex-role stereotyping	15 (79%)
	2. Less sex-role stereotyping	4 (21%)

Changing Roles

In fact, the roles of women have changed over the past decades. As the U.S. Bureau of the Census data (1988) shows women in the United States have become more educated. The percentage of women who earned degrees conferred rose from 40.4% in 1970 to 49.3% in 1985. Increasingly, more women are working in and entering what have traditionally been men's occupations. For instance, the percentage of married women with children age under six years old in the labor force was 3.9% in 1970, but it increased to 6.6% in 1986. The proportion of women in managerial and professional specialties rose from 33.9% to 43.4% in 1986 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988). Moreover, the recent data also showed that the programs which have women as main characters were increasing (Networking Women, March, 13, 1989).

Although women are developing more significant roles in American society, this trend is very slow and indistinct. The findings, which vary in this study, may show some effects of this social change over the past decades. Future researchers should pay more attention to effect research and various types of programs to examine that 1) the behavior of male and female characters is sex-stereotyped and 2) viewers perceive and model their own behavior after that of the characters.

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